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CRITICAL NOTICE.

THE LITERARY STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

The Literary Study of the Bible, an account of the leading forms of literature represented in the Sacred writings, intended for English readers. By RICHARD G. MOULTON, M.A., Ph.D. London, Isbister & Co., 1896.

The Modern Reader's Bible. A Series of works from the Sacred Scriptures, presented in modern literary form. By R. G. MOULTON, M.A. (Camb.), Ph.D. (Penn.). New York and London, Macmillan & Co., 1896. *The Proverbs; The book of Job; Ecclesiasticus; Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Solomon; Deuteronomy.*

THE Bible has been terribly maltreated in the various translations of the Churches. Divided into chapters, which often split up a book quite wrongly, and into verses, which always spoil the continuous text of the narratives, printed so that every verse begins with another line, the books of the Bible are sadly disfigured. As a consequence of this unfortunate method of editing, "the vast majority of those who read the Bible have never shaken off the mediaeval tendency to look upon it as a collection of isolated sentences, isolated texts, isolated verses. Their intention is nothing but reverent, but the effect of their imperfect reading is to degrade a sacred literature into a pious scrap-book." This is how Prof. Moulton expresses his indignation at such misuse (*Lit. Stud.* 82). He is not the first to feel an irritation on this score, nor is the Revised Version, which he praises, because there at least a proper distinction is drawn between prose and poetry, the first attempt to do away to some extent with this evil. As English seems to be the only modern literature with which Moulton is acquainted, he probably did not know of *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments*, edited by E. Kautzsch, nor C. Weiszäcker's *Das Neue Testament*, nor the French and German translations of the Bible by E. Reuss, nor numerous translations of single books, in which the distinction between prose and poetry is made clear, just as in the Revised Version. In Holland, too, this has also been done, e.g. in the so-called Synodical translation of the New Testament of 1866.

It is not the rabbis who are to blame for the mutilation of most of the older translations, as Moulton supposes, but the Christians. Though the Jews were aware of the division into verses, at least as regards the Law, in the synagogue scrolls the division is not indicated, and in their manuscripts the verses do not each begin with a fresh line. The division into chapters, moreover, first arose, about 1200, among the Christians, and was imported into the Hebrew Bible from the Vulgate.

But whoever be to blame for these mutilations, they are unquestionably ugly, and an obstacle to the right understanding of the text. He who would appreciate the Bible from a literary point of view must set aside this mistaken division into chapters and verses (and even that of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into two books), and since we need *some* divisions, in order to get a survey of the whole, we must substitute a better system in its place. This is what Moulton attempts to do. He seeks, moreover, to describe the different literary forms found in the various books of the Bible, as far as he can, making them the more apparent by artifices of printing. An oration, he maintains, must be immediately recognized as such, a sonnet must wear its own form, and a drama must be exhibited as such to the eye. He is a professor of English literature, and knows no Hebrew. He is no theologian by profession, not even a dilettante in theology, and though he has used the works of Driver and Cheyne as well as several other commentaries on the Old and New Testament, he is in reality a stranger in the domain of theological problems, even in so far as they have reference to the Bible. But this does not in any way deter him. For his book is not intended to be either edifying or theological, but purely literary, and literary in the most limited sense. For even in a "literary" work it is not sufficient to treat solely of the form. The treatment of the subject-matter too belongs to literature. Moulton, it is true, does not wholly omit a discussion of the contents. Filled with admiration for the beautiful form of the books of the Old and New Testament, and of a few of the apocryphal books, he again and again tries to show how this form is in perfect harmony with the rich and varied subject-matter. But he does his best to avoid all theological, and especially all critical, questions. His aim is to teach us to appreciate the Bible as it now exists. And to this end what can it matter to whom a particular writing is ascribed, and from what period it dates? It is beautiful, effective, and well constructed. It is this which is not generally recognized, and this is what Moulton desires to demonstrate.

With this object he points to the book of Job as an example of varied literary forms: dramatic interest of background, dramatic

movements in the dialogues, epic character, importance from a philosophical point of view, scientific value (the land question is discussed in Job!), prophecy, rhetoric, versification—there is something of all this in Job. The discussion then turns upon the classes into which the sacred writings fall when considered from a literary point of view. Lyric and epic poetry, philosophical and prophetic literature are in turn examined. Moulton includes The Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus in the Bible. That he should take just these two from the apocryphal books, and leave the others even unmentioned is, in my opinion, entirely arbitrary. He knows well enough that besides these there exists a Jewish literature, but he supposes it to be all contained in the books of the rabbis. That there is also extant besides a rich Jewish literature handed down to us in different languages he evidently has not the least suspicion.

The five little books, the contents of which are sufficiently indicated by their titles, are closely connected with the principal work. They are examples of the treatment of entire books, according to the principles which in *The Literary Study* are applied to fragments only. But Moulton does more than merely edit these books. Ardent student of form as he is, he knows well enough that a book is read for the contents, and that for their adequate appreciation introduction and commentary are required. So he edits the books with introductions and notes. The text is that of the Revised Version, to which Moulton thinks it necessary to adhere, but the marginal renderings of the Revised Version are occasionally adopted. He regards any departure either from the Revised Version or the existing Hebrew as an extremely dubious proceeding, but in all that relates to the divisions, the external arrangement, and the stage-directions, not only in the Revised Version, but also in the Hebrew text, but little reliance is to be placed. In these matters the modern edition is wholly free. If the text has "Job said," where it is obvious that the words which follow are not from his mouth, but are spoken by one of his friends, then the editor simply emendates to "Zophar." The "Job said" of the text is merely a stage-direction without authority.

The mere mention of these things leads me on naturally to the task of criticism. It is impossible indeed to read thus far without immediately observing that in this respect Moulton's method is purely arbitrary. If it be permitted in a traditional text to change the speaker at will, then to that text, so handled, no authority is ascribed. Such a change is surely no matter of subordinate importance. Insert before one of the prophecies such a direction as

"God speaks," "the prophet speaks," "the repentant people speaks," "the adversaries of the Lord speak," and you probably alter the meaning of the whole. And even if these directions are correct, that is to say, true to the meaning of the prophet, yet the passage is not presented in the form in which it has been handed down to us. It is altered, whether it be for better or for worse.

I quote one example of the insertion of "stage-directions." In Job xxxviii. 1 (immediately after the speeches of Elihu), the text has: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said." This is omitted by Moulton, who goes on immediately to what follows. In xxxvi. 21 (to introduce presumably the words, "Behold, God doth loftily in his power") we read, "From this point the signs of an approaching storm become visible in the sky." After the words, "the cattle also concerning the storm that cometh up" (xxxvi. 33), Moulton adds, "a loud peal of thunder; the storm steadily increases." He inserts these remarks because it is apparently a storm which is being spoken of, but pays no heed to the fact that the words "the storm" are printed in italics, and that in the margin is put "it." Had he known Hebrew, he would have known that the verse is a *crux interpretum*. Then at xxxvii. 14, before the words, "Hearken unto this, O Job," he puts, "The storm has become a whirlwind; the whole scene is wrapped in thick darkness broken by flashes of lightning." By this "direction" the object of the verb "hearken" becomes the roar of the thunder, whereas it is really, in the intention of the poet, the arguments of Elihu. Before xxxvii. 21 we are told that "supernatural brightness mingles strangely with the darkness of the storm," and at the end of Elihu's speech that "the roar of the whirlwind gives place to a Voice." This voice then speaks out of the whirlwind. After xl. 2 "a lull in the storm" takes place. After Job has spoken the whirlwind begins anew, and from out of it there speaks again a Voice. At xli. 34 the storm begins to abate; then the Voice "retreating" utters again one line, which in the traditional text is spoken by Job (xli. 3 a). The Voice, "more distant," speaks again (xli. 4-6), and after Job has answered "the storm ceases."

Of all this there was undoubtedly nothing before the mind of the poet. He would never, for instance, have distinguished between the storm and the supernatural brightness. Moulton himself knows that the authenticity of Elihu's speeches is seriously doubted. He refuses to enter on that discussion, and professes to take the book as it stands. So he says, at least, but his actions belie his words. As a matter of fact he suffers his phantasy to play upon the text. Till now there was only one book of the Bible, which most of the

commentators treated in this manner, the Song of Solomon. In their despairing attempts to find some unity in this collection of bridal songs, they invented all sorts of stage-directions. Moulton does this too, and he does it with all these writings or passages, where he can find an opportunity.

In the same way his imagination leads him astray whenever he desires to indicate the various "forms" of the Biblical poems. He wants to have the psalms, prophecies, and other passages printed in different types, with indented and projecting lines of all possible kinds and variations. This is all very well, provided he presents the matter as the authors meant it. But is he able to judge? Has he even made a serious attempt to discover their meaning? He says, and rightly I think, that in Hebrew poetry the exact number of syllables is comparatively disregarded, and its character reveals itself especially in the parallelism of ideas. This, in my opinion, is correct; but he has, properly speaking, no right to judge on the point, nor to pronounce the attempts of Bickell and others to take into account the number of syllables as wrong. The attitude which he adopts towards the special rhythmical form of the Hebrew Lamentation or Elegy, so ably developed and maintained by Budde, is very characteristic. He knows of it, for it was explained in *The New World*, and he alludes to it (p. 157). But it is a mere allusion, and is put to no use whatever. And yet this is almost the only form of Hebrew poetry, concerning which experts are now agreed! But while he neglects it, he sets about dividing the text of the Revised Version into stanzas, and subdivisions of stanzas, without any knowledge of the Hebrew text, and often without even paying sufficient regard to the meaning. What reason has he for printing the simple first Psalm in the following manner?

Blessed is the man
 that walketh not
 in the counsel
 of the wicked,
 Nor standeth
 in the way
 of sinners,
 Nor sitteth
 in the seat
 of the scornful.
 But his delight
 is in the law of the Lord :
 And in his law

doth he meditate day and night.
And he shall be like a Tree
 Planted
 by the streams of water,
 That bringeth forth its fruit
 in its season;
 Whose leaf also
 doth not wither,
 And whatsoever he doeth
 shall prosper.
 The wicked are not so,
 But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.
 Therefore the wicked shall not stand
 in the judgment,
 Nor sinners
 in the congregation of the righteous.
 For the LORD knoweth
 the way of the righteous,
 But the way of the wicked
 shall perish.

Moulton sees much "lyric beauty" in this. Concerning questions of taste it is difficult to dispute. To my mind it is tasteless, artificial, and false. But however this may be, could any one maintain that it represents the intention of the poet? And yet Moulton makes bold to say (p. 192), "The first psalm may be said to bestow a blessing on the literary study of the Bible."

Other passages he treats in a manner equally fantastic. To explain Psalm cxviii, he says (p. 162), "The worshipper and his escort approach the Temple," and the psalm is then portioned out between chorus, worshipper, and escort, who occasionally even take turns line by line. At ver. 20, "the Temple gates open," and "disclose a chorus of priests," who sing a few lines, and are answered by the worshipper and escort. At ver. 26 "the worshipper enters the Temple, the escort prepares to retire," which they accordingly do, after listening to one line from the priests. Then the chorus sing the closing verse. Prof. Moulton does not seem to know that laymen were not allowed to enter the temple, and that this whole theatrical performance is therefore impossible. His imagination not only misleads him to the extent of dividing the Book of Proverbs into five parts, on p. 284 he even says, "the fivefold division of this work (and of *Ecclesiasticus*) is as well marked as in the *Book of Psalms*." I had never perceived it myself. He even ventures to

give the etymology of the word "prophecy" (p. 327). *Ne sutor ultra crepidam!*

When any one allows himself to be guided by his imagination, his traditional opinions and personal sympathies are a matter of prime importance. Now Prof. Moulton has very strong sympathies with all that is good and pure, and to this he adds a strong affection for the Bible. One passage, he owns, is more beautiful than another, but in his book we pass from one expression of admiration to the other. All is fair, both as regards the form and as regards the contents. Even Psalm cxix. is beautiful, and so far as *Ecclesiastes* is concerned, "I say boldly that there is nothing unwholesome in *Ecclesiastes*" (p. xxii, *Introduction to Ecclesiastes and Wisdom*). That is bold in truth; too bold.

Though I am unable therefore, to my regret, to say much in favour of *The Literary Study of the Bible*, yet the five small books, which are offered to us under the title of *The Modern Reader's Bible*, may certainly with some reservation be recommended. What has been said of the chief work with regard to the introductions and subdivisions, applies to these in equal measure. This is obvious, for they are but examples of the method which the author has explained he wishes to see adopted in all the Biblical books. But they present the Revised Version in a tasteful form and setting. And this is of some importance. In the first place there is much that is beautiful in these books, and they are far too little known. Educated readers look upon the books of the Bible in quite a different light from any others. Many an educated Englishman or Englishwoman will read a play of Shakespeare's, and make an effort to understand Browning, but how few are willing to do their best to understand the Book of Job, or to read portions of the Proverbs? The Bible is regarded as literature *sui generis*, which belongs to the Church, and to the Sabbath or Sunday. When we want something to read on a journey, or seek a book to study, either alone or with others, it never occurs to us to turn to the Bible. Now here are five nice little books, well bound in cloth, and daintily printed on good paper. They can be read as though they were secular books. Of course they require a serious frame of mind, but neither can Hamlet nor Browning's Saul be read thoughtlessly. They are edited with introductions, divided into parts with headings, just like a book of our own day, and with a certain amount of commentary. There is much in them that is fantastical, it is true. But the editor is a serious, warm-hearted, and poetical man. The Biblical books become alive under his treatment of them. Does it represent the meaning of the original authors? Not always, and yet in many cases perhaps it does. The

Hebrew writer did not separate off a few verses from the rest in order to put them as introduction on the first page; he wrote straight on, parchment was dear, and he left no space unfilled. But in their present form, as they stand out distinctly on the white page, these "introductions" and "title-pages" do indubitably attract the eye! We linger over their perusal, and read what follows in quite a different frame of mind. In this way we learn to know some of the most precious works of literature, but precious rather from a religious than a literary point of view. There are, it is true, many fine narratives, songs, orations, and sayings in the Bible, and it is worthy of praise to draw attention to their beauty, but most of the Biblical writers were no masters of literary form. What they give us is spiritual food for earnest, thoughtful minds. And this food Moulton's edition, it is to be hoped, will help to put within the reach of many.

H. OORT.